Sexual Harassment at Workplace - #MeToo movement - II

Click here for Part I

What is the issue?

With the #Me Too movement in place, understanding the aspects associated with the movement and sexual harassment becomes essential.

Nothing we do can make this world perfect. It can only make our situations better.

Why is #Me Too a better tool?

With opinions that the #Me Too movement is not the legal way of addressing the issue, here is why it nevertheless is a better tool.

- Public backlash against instances of sexual harassment at workplaces is less to expect given the male-dominated nature.
- Unlike this case, the new social media weapon under #Me Too offers access to anyone.
- So the age-old workplace tactics of silencing the victims or other ways of intimidating will not work as easily as earlier.
- Publicly calling out people who sexually harass, rules out the struggle to get the office officialdom to take note and act upon.
- Naming and shaming can work better against even powerful men, whose influential nature earlier silenced women from reporting.
It offers a better option to express than running around the police and courts with huge time and money costs.

Besides these, #MeToo has changed women's attitude in approaching sexual or any gender-based harassment henceforth.

It has created a widespread conversation about breaking silence, combating shame, shattering disbelief, and creating safe environments.

The shift is from “it’s my fault (that such a thing happened to me)” to “it’s my right (to not have such things happen to me)”.

Why do women hesitate reporting?

- **Society** - Many women do not believe that they have the right to not be treated in undignified way.
- As, women are made to believe that they are infiltrators trying to force their way into the men’s world.
- Girls, from the childhood, are conditioned with ideas such as
  
  i. take care of yourself
  
  ii. don’t put yourself in harm’s way
  
  iii. dress conservatively
  
  iv. change jobs or make career sacrifices to avoid people when you get signals that are uncomfortable
  
  v. don’t speak about harassments because everyone will say that it was probably your fault
- So the mind set is that “bad things” are bound to happen to women who “break the rules” and “live dangerously”.

- **Limitations** that restrict women from speaking up are:

  - the dominant status of men in workplaces, their power and privilege
  - the very lack of understanding on what constitutes sexual harassment
  - the social stigma associated with instances of sexual harassments and fear of re-victimisation
  - the mental trauma, a sense of fear, intimidation and powerlessness caused due to the incident
  - the lack of trust on people to share this with
  - the lack of awareness on the legal recourses available - 20 or 30 years ago, a working woman had no redressal mechanism if harassed (Click [here](#) to know more on shortfalls in the present law)
  - fear over job and financial security, career progress, if reported

- Given these, the scope and nature of the movement offers the awareness, courage and the needed support for aggrieved women.

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**Is #Me Too movement inclusive in India?**

- ’Me Too’ has its origins in Black feminism and the initiative of Tarana Burke, an African-American civil rights activist.

- As a hashtag, #MeToo became an online movement and engendered solidarity across race and class lines in America.
But sexual harassment is dictated not only by sex or gender, but by factors of race, caste, religion, colour, region, age, disability and sexuality too.

In India, sexual harassment issue has been defined by the struggles of Dalit-Bahujan and Adivasi sisters.

Race and caste divides had aggravated sexual harassment experiences.

In this backdrop, the movement is confined to upper-caste, middle-class, urban, non-disabled, cisgender women (same sex and gender identity as at birth).

What is the way forward?

**Society** - Women should unapologetically assert the right to be treated as people with dignity and not as objects.

It is essential to break the notions that "boys will be boys" and "women have to pay the price for stepping out of their homes".

**Inclusiveness** - India has to find ways to relate the #Me Too movement to the subaltern communities.

Dalit, Adivasi, Muslim, disabled, queer, poor and non-English speaking women should become part of #MeToo as it is #HerToo.

In all, the #Me Too movement has certainly laid a never-before foundation in terms of attitude and recourses.

Women and society should build on it and take it further to ensure freedom-filled and dignified places for women.
Source: Indian Express, The Hindu, BusinessLine

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